

MELIGETHES CORVINUS ERICHSON, 1845 (COLEOPTERA: NITIDULIDAE) REAFFIRMED AS A BRITISH SPECIES

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Meligethes corvinus has proved one of our most elusive *Meligethes* species, and is known from just a few specimens collected at Mickleham and Caterham, Surrey, in the early 1870s (*vide* Rye, 1872a: 267; 1872b: 37; Champion, 1873: 39), details of which are given in Kirk-Spriggs (1996: 53). The late A. M. Easton (1907–1989), who lived at Great Bookham, Surrey for many years collected extensively on the Surrey commons, and despite his concerted efforts to collect this species was unable to do so. He further examined all specimens published as such, and in every case the material was misidentified (Kirk-Spriggs 1996: 54). As a result the species has for many years been regarded as extinct in the British Isles, and is recorded as such by Hyman & Parsons (1994: 66). It was, therefore, of great surprise to us to find two unidentified female specimens collected by the second author from Ranmore Common, Surrey, 26.v.1968, 'sweeping low, damp vegetation, mainly *Primula* sp. & *Viola* sp., edge of beech wood', along with two male *M. carinulatus* Förster, 1849.

Ranmore Common is less than two miles from Mickleham where *M. corvinus* was first collected in the early 1870s. Caterham, Mickleham, and Ranmore Common are all on the North Downs chalk escarpment. It seems likely that the species has been present continuously in the area since its first capture, and this highlights the problem of finding species with small, very localized populations, and the need for caution in promulgating extinction in such cases. The early date of capture of the specimens indicates that they were probably overwintering adults.

We have compared the specimens with one of G. C. Champion's original Caterham specimens (now in the NMWC), and they fit well on external characters and genitalia. The female genitalia of *M. corvinus* are the most distinctive of all the British species (*vide* Kirk-Spriggs, 1996, fig. 301), and we are left in no doubt as to the identity of the specimens.

Meligethes corvinus is a member of the *subrugosus* species-group, of which there are only two British representatives, *viz.* *M. subrugosus* and *M. corvinus*. The species-group may be separated from others in having the anterior tibiae crenulate throughout (with no larger more prominent teeth towards the apex), in having narrow side borders to the pronotum, and by their very distinctive male and female genitalia (*vide* Kirk-Spriggs, 1996, figs. 225–228, 300–301).

Both species are associated with the botanical family Campanulaceae of the genus *Campanula*; but whilst *M. corvinus* has been shown to be associated with species of *Campanula* with medium to large flowers, particularly *C. latifolia* L., *C. rapunculoides* L. and *C. trachelium* L. on the Continent (Audisio, 1993: 780), the British larval host-plant has not been ascertained. Audisio (1993: 780) also notes that adults may also occasionally frequent species of *Lamium* and *Galeopsis* (Lamiaceae) on the Continent. The species is confined to the shaded edge of old woods (Kirk-Spriggs, 1996: 53), particularly those of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) (Audisio, 1993: 780).

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BOOK REVIEW

† **Keys to the insects of the European part of the USSR. Volume 3, Hymenoptera, Part 5**, Science Publishers, Lebanon, New Hampshire, USA, 1996, xiii + 507 pp, hardback, US \$95.00.—This is an English translation of a work originally published in the Russian language, covering the braconid subfamilies Opiinae, Alysiinae and Aphidiinae (the latter treated as a family). V. I. Tobias is an author of all parts: he is solely responsible for Alysiinae and joined by A. B. Jakimavičius and I. G. Kiriyak for Opiinae and Aphidiinae respectively. The key to subfamilies was given in Part 4, and the numbering sequence of subfamilies and genera follows on from that.

The general remarks made in reviewing Part 4, on the rest of the Braconidae, apply (*Br. J. Ent. Nat. Hist.* 1996: 9: 189–190): it is a very useful compilation, but not quite as reliable or easy to use as it looks. The present part covers 1020 species in 100 genera, of which 38 species and 1 genus (plus 2 subgenera) are described as new. As with part 4, these nominal taxa take the date of publication of the Russian original, and it is a serious scientific flaw that nowhere in this translated version can that date (1986) be discovered. As with part 4, much of the work is heavily derivative and cobbled together from sources of variable quality. And, as with part 4, the text would have benefited from a final read-through by a knowledgeable English-speaking entomologist—it may then have been possible to avoid our being told that all Aphidiidae (i.e. Aphidiinae) are “parasites of lice”. This is, of course, also a good illustration of the risks of using common names—plant lice perhaps can't be expected to adhere to vegetarianism under the stresses and strains of translation. But the more serious warning is to be aware of the possibility of translation/transcription errors, especially those that would evade a spellcheck.

In some cases keys to large genera are extremely long, either because the genera (such as *Chorebus*, 492 couplets) are very species-rich, or because generic names (such as *Opius*, 680 couplets) cover rather messy and unresolved generic-level uncertainties as well. One large group (*Aspilota* + *Synaldis*) was judged to be in such a difficult state taxonomically that no key to species is given. The key I tried to use particularly (to *Phaenocarpa*, 132 couplets) permitted reasonable progress once I had sussed the couplet numbering error on p. 200, which should read 12(117) rather than 12(17)—but for all of these difficult groups accurate and confident progress will almost always require a reliably determined reference collection. Despite these problems and shortcomings, however, the translation usefully brings into the English language a lot of material that was otherwise scattered and sometimes hard to get hold of, quite apart from its being (mostly) in German originally. Although some parts of the classification have, since the date of the Russian original, been substantially improved (and in some cases publication on this has been in English) this is a very useful book for anyone who reads English better than Russian and who has a need to identify, at least provisionally, these fascinating and very understudied insects from the Western Palaearctic.